

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000012

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR SA/FO AMBASSADOR QUINN, SA/A, EUR/RPM, EUR/ACE
DEPT PASS FEMA
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
REL NATO/AUS/NZ/ISAF
USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PRT/TARIN KOWT: URUZGAN PREPARES FOR SPRING
FLOODS WITH PRT ASSISTANCE

11. (U) Summary: PRT Tarin Kowt is helping Uruzgan Province plan and prepare to avert a replay of last year,s devastating spring floods that left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. Along with a number of concrete local projects, the PRT has focused on building the local administration,s response capability including arranging for an Army Corps of Engineers flood mitigation specialist to travel to Afghanistan and conduct emergency management training. The training was well attended by Uruzgan government, police, military, and non-governmental officials. The event consisted of briefings on flood forecasting and the emergency management phases of preparation, response, and recovery. These briefings were followed by a map exercise in which Afghan officials planned together how best to prepare for and cope with a flood in a notional river valley community. The PRT will build on provincial level training with similar training at the district level in the coming months. Finally, the PRT facilitated the instructor and local officials visiting several potential flood sites. Short trainings focused on flood response could be useful at other PRTs prior to the onset of spring snow-melt and rains. End Summary.

Background

12. (U) Like much of the country in the spring of 2005, Uruzgan suffered severely from flooding as a result of snow fall followed by heavy rainfall. Nearly 90 villages spread across all five districts of the province were damaged by flood waters causing over 200 fatalities and directly affecting almost 11,000 people. Moreover, in this remote province with few social or relief services, the ripple effect of these floods extended far beyond just the official numbers as victims of the disaster were forced to rely on already hard-pressed family and tribal ties. Despite the unpredictable timing and force of the flooding, much of the calamity might have been averted or mitigated. During the previous seven years of drought, many villagers had moved their homes into flood plains or even down into riverbeds for better access to water. Furthermore, irrigation canals and culverts had become clogged with silt and other blockage.

13. (SBU) This winter, the PRT,s Civil Affairs Team and USAID Representative have worked to assist the provincial administration prepare for spring floods. Using a mixture of funding from the Army,s Commander,s Emergency Relief Program (CERP) and from USAID,s Quick Impact Program (QIP) and Cash for Work Programs, the PRT has supported a medley of projects including pre-positioning relief supplies in strategic locations, paying villagers to repair canals and karezs (underground canal systems), developing local industry to build gabion rock cages to shore up embankments, and repairing and reinforcing local roads and crossings. These tangible measures of assistance aside, the PRT,s main focus has been capacity-building within the local administration and pressing them to plan and prepare their own institutions for disaster response. (Comment: Response from the provincial government has been mixed, but two key ministries, Irrigation and Reconstruction and Rural Development (MRRD), have reacted positively and have begun working proactively.)

Emergency Management Training

14. (U) At the heart of the PRT,s efforts at capacity building was a three-day training seminar on emergency management conducted by Mr. Gary Brown of the Army

Corps of Engineers. A specialist in flood mitigation working out of a Corps Lab in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Mr. Brown worked for a month in post-Katrina New Orleans and was thus well-qualified to advise and train others on the effects of massive flooding and the critical importance of effective planning, preparation, and response.

15. (SBU) The training was well attended by Uruzgan officials representing the Provincial Ministries of Irrigation, Health, Education, RRD, the Afghan National and Highway Police, the Afghan National Army, and the Red Crescent Society. The first morning consisted of two briefings. The first concentrated on the causes of flooding and flood forecasting and the second explained the basic emergency management phases of preparation, response, and recovery. Several Afghan participants asked questions about Hurricane Katrina and Mr. Brown responded candidly and used the questions and his answers to reinforce the importance of planning and preparation. (Comment: The Afghan officials present appeared genuinely impressed with Mr. Brown's frank appraisal and his actual experience working in the aftermath of Katrina.)

16. (SBU) The second day focused on the responsibilities of each organization followed by a map exercise in which Afghan officials planned together how best to prepare and cope with a flood in a notional valley community. Using a map and miniature buildings and terrain elements, the Afghan officials led by Mr. Brown discussed where to build gabion walls and culverts, and how to preposition supplies, designate evacuation sites, and respond to a flood. (Comment: Although rudimentary, the map exercise allowed participants to explore the relatively unfamiliar process of inter-agency planning and coordination.)

17. (U) On the final day, the Civil Affairs Team and Mr. Brown accompanied by the Provincial Ministers of Irrigation and RRD traveled along the banks of the Tarin River, a major waterway running east to west across the breadth of Uruzgan. Mr. Brown observed several potential flood sites and made practical suggestions for flood mitigation and the placement of gabion embankments.

18. (U) Building on this provincial level emergency training conducted by Mr. Brown, the PRT will assist Provincial Ministries in organizing training at the district level. These trainings will be implemented in the next few months prior to the beginning of spring. District training is aimed at not only building local capacity to respond to flooding but also to develop linkages and relationships between key figures in the provincial and district administrations.

Comment

19. (SBU) The training provided by Mr. Brown in just a three day seminar was effective, and his obvious expertise conferred creditability upon the efforts of the PRT. Providing more flood mitigation trainings through the Corps of Engineers or Federal Emergency Management Agency at other U.S. PRTs before March could be a valuable means of supporting U.S. policy in the region. Additionally, ISAF PRTs could implement similar training seminars by accessing NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center, which has considerable experience in Europe responding to floods and other natural disasters. In either case, building GOA capacity in emergency management will not only save lives and property but likely will increase pro-government sentiment by showing tangible evidence of the GOA's growing ability to provide for its citizens.

110. (SBU) The success of this particular emergency management training seminar emphasizes the continued value of on-the-ground civilian expertise at PRTs. While having large numbers of permanent party U.S. officials at PRTs is impractical, utilizing short-term visits and events such as this event can act as a reasonable substitute. Accessing the considerable human capital of the Federal and State governments, for periods as short as even a week, provides significant added value to the PRT's missions of improving local governance capacity and facilitating reconstruction and economic development. End comment.

NEUMANN